

The Working Group was welcomed by co-chairs Amanda Beal and Tom Abello. New Working Group members and public attendees introduced themselves. Facilitator Jo D. Saffair noted corrections in December meeting notes and updated briefing materials for the January meeting.

Tom Abello reminded the Work Group that it is charged with considering impacts on low-income and vulnerable communities. He noted that the Natural & Working Lands Working Group has no specific target numbers for greenhouse gas/carbon emission reductions but should put forward its best recommendations to the Climate Council.

Amanda Beal reflected on the previous meeting, and some comments that were made about the structure and progression of the conversation. She pointed out that the goal of these three initial discussions about forestry, natural lands, and agriculture isn't necessarily to come away with strategies at this point, but to build a baseline understanding among the group about key considerations. Some strategy ideas will emerge, but we will make more space to talk about strategies later. For now, we should be identifying gaps in our understanding that need to be filled, voices that are missing from the conversation, etc. and it's clear from the notes of the last meeting that we are doing that, so we're on track.

**Stacy Knapp (DEP) presented an update on the State's greenhouse gas reduction goals and accomplishments [see accompanying PowerPoint presentation].**

2017 gross GHG emissions were 17.5% below 1990 baseline (better than the 10% reduction goal).

Maine will meet its 2020 GHG reduction goal and is on track to meet the 2030 goal with enhanced effort.

Additional action will be needed to achieve 2050 GHG reduction goals.

DEP is required to report on net GHG emissions as of 2022, which will involve estimates for working lands.

**Andy Cutko (DACF/Parks & Lands) discussed the role of natural lands in climate mitigation and adaptation [see accompanying PowerPoint presentation].**

**DISCUSSION POINTS:**

The Nature Conservancy's "Natural Climate Solutions" report (Fargione, et al.) charts strategies for carbon reductions based on several assumed prices for carbon credits; these pricing assumptions are important in considering priorities for NWL strategies.

The TNC "NCS" report needs to be tailored to Maine (e.g., reforestation may not be a priority in a state that is predominantly forested).

Ecological Reserve data been evaluated only superficially, as 10-year inventories have only been done twice; next survey may start to show trends.

Canada is committed to increasing land conservation; New Brunswick will increase conserved lands from 5 to 10% in the next year.

The forest products industry has concerns about "harvest hiatus" schedules as part of natural forest management. Maine has significant peatland areas; thawing and drying leads to decomposition and increased releases of carbon dioxide and methane.

Conservation strategies can be simple and straight-forward: provide strategic protection for biodiversity hotspots; maintain well-managed forests in between; provide connectivity through intact riparian areas and natural landscapes; and identify and manage future potential hotspots.

Landowners are willing to conserve land if funding is provided.

Conservation strategies for natural lands can also be applied to working lands and developed areas.

There new opportunities for additional carbon sequestration on natural lands, such as wetland restoration; the state/federal Natural Resource Conservation Program uses wetland mitigation funds from development projects to conserve and restore wetlands.

NRCS income eligibility requirements keep large landowners from participating in various farm Bill programs.

**Nathan Webb (IF&W) discussed the updated State Wildlife Action Plan [details available on the IF&W website at: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/wildlife-action-plan.html> ]**

**DISCUSSION POINTS:**

The Wildlife Action Plan doesn't have specific climate actions, but the strategies apply to all stressors (including those that are climate-related).

IF&W has limited ability to influence landscape-level conservation in part due the complex nature of land ownership in Maine.

We need to find ways to create robust landscapes that maintain ecological values and sustain the forest and agricultural economies.

**Eliza Donoghue (Maine Audubon) discussed MAS's new publication "Renewable Energy and Wildlife in Maine" [see accompanying handout].**

There are potential land impacts with ramping up renewable energy projects such as solar and wind.

The potential buildout of renewable energy projects in Maine could be as much as 550,000 acres.

We need to accomplish greenhouse gas reductions while protecting land and ecological values.

**DISCUSSION POINTS:**

There are 600 energy projects currently under review at DEP; we need a coordinated approach to project review to fully reflect State goals for natural resources.

IF&W's environmental review team is inundated with renewable energy project reviews.

**Jo D. Saffair asked the Work Group to clarify desired outcomes or suggest specific strategies.**

The Coastal & Marine Working Group is working on coastal wetlands strategies.

Working Groups should collaborate on common issues; the Maine Climate Council Steering Committee will be discussing this next week.

We need a state bond for strategic conservation to protect endangered species from climate change, and increased staff capacity to ensure careful siting review of renewable energy and development projects to avoid habitat impacts.

Advocates for various bond proposals need to recognize overarching human needs; propose a bond issue that addresses multiple needs, such as conservation and transportation, food, housing, or jobs – these are all interconnected and should not be siloed

Will new land bonds result in more acquisitions or more targeted use restrictions? Support improved resiliency.

Climate impacts should be considered in a bond for Lands For Maine's Future Program.

Soil & Water Conservation Districts and NRCS need expanded capacity to provide conservation planning.

Review recommendations in the American Forests handout.

Revitalize Beginning With Habitat Program with additions beyond biodiversity to address climate impacts.

Identify the best uses of our resources and avoid haphazard siting of projects.

Industrial forest owners have made progress at the landscape level with conservation easements, forest practices certifications, stream connectivity, and collaborative wildlife management efforts.

LMF bond proposal is pending in the Appropriations Committee; there is opportunity to adjust the language in the legislation; proposed funding is high and may also be adjusted.

Support bonding to promote resiliency and connectivity.

Resiliency doesn't increase carbon sequestration; how can we capture and store more carbon?

Use federal wetland conservation funds.

NRCS is creative in Maine but must work within legal restrictions.

Large forested wetlands are often in remote locations and not significantly threatened.

Wetland restoration is likely to focus on southern Maine.

Natural lands discussion focuses on resiliency and adaptation.

LMF bond is a significant opportunity to keep forests as forests and help climate.

Consider leakage and additionality in carbon sequestration; conserving lands can move land use activity to other locations; we should grow economically valuable wood fiber in proportion to additional land preservation.

Maine forest industry could grow by 40 percent with new opportunities.

Address forest resilience to increasing invasive species pressures.

Keep working lands working to avoid additional emissions from urbanization; fund farmland protection.

Landowners need guidance and assistance with conservation easements.

There is uncertainty about how much carbon natural lands will retain in the future; we must determine how to offset carbon losses from natural lands; increased drought will lead to increased plant mortality.

We need both regulatory and non-regulatory approaches for riparian habitat protection; there are deficiencies in existing shoreland zoning standards.

Funding is needed for better stream crossing management; forest management exemptions in shoreland zoning should be reviewed.

We are losing forests in southern Maine; local planning and regulation needs to be supported and focused on climate response; additional regional planning for climate response is needed.

Consider incentives for landowners in addition to funding and regulation.

Incentivize municipalities to incorporate climate in plans and ordinances.

The State provides overarching land use policy while towns implement specific permitting and enforcement; there is a lack of State technical assistance to towns.

The former State Planning Office led local planning assistance; DACF Municipal Planning Assistance Program has more limited capacity now.

The Community Resilience Working Group is discussing municipal planning for climate response.

Review the Open Space Tax Law; there is an unfunded section for species protection; revive the State Planning Office function to support municipal comprehensive planning.

Maine Association of Conservation Commissions has a bill to empower municipal conservation commissions to conduct planning for climate response.

Concerns about expansion of riparian zone protection; need to improve current efforts before imposing new restrictions.

Review the Family Forest handout; the Open Space Tax Program has not been updated in many years.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Doug Baldwin (Porter) – provided 2-page handout for the Working Group

Peter Hagerty (Porter) – we have a history of good small woodlot management practices; MOFGA Low Impact Forestry Project

Doug Denico (Madison) – concerned about expanding riparian restrictions; shorelands have valuable forests if harvested carefully; better to manage carefully than let trees fall and decay; further regulations could force land sales for development

Mark Berry – the Working Group needs to consider riparian zones further and prevent development

Jennifer Melville (Open Space Institute)? – we need to increase resiliency and sequestration simultaneously

#### **NEXT MEETING:**

February 7<sup>th</sup> – full day; snow date is February 14<sup>th</sup>

Focus will be on agriculture in the morning; subcommittee will discuss speakers and materials via conference call

Mark Berry – what is the state's agricultural vision?

Ellen Griswold – look at agricultural climate efforts in other states

Public input sessions are planned for late March